

## CHAPTER FOUR

# POTTER'S LAKE

“There is an unexplainable appeal to Potter’s Lake, almost an unearthly pull that draws people to it. Perhaps it’s the quaintness or sheer absurdity of everything. Perhaps it is something more...”

Potter's Lake is the official setting for *Heaven & Earth*. It is small town U.S.A. in a nutshell but with more than its share of quirks and mysteries. Potter's Lake has a population between 15,000 and 20,000, making it larger than the average run-of-the-mill Mayberry RFD, yet it retains the feel of a small community.

Potter's Lake is the home of St. Anselm College, a small Catholic institution located in the town proper, making it an archetypal college community. Potter's Lake also has a small but prosperous industry in the form of Southey's Paper Mill (which sits on the lake and is across the street from St. Anselm). The paper mill is the major employer in town, contracting a fair portion of the local populace. The college is the second major employer, while the remaining residents work in various service industry jobs designed to capitalize on the influx of college students.

Powell Base rests just outside Potter's Lake and serves as a training facility for the Air Force. This provides additional income for local merchants, particularly those with a liquor license.

Potter's Lake is named for the large lake beside which it rests. Both the paper mill and the college butt up against this body of water that lies on the western edge of town. Encompassing the lake and the northern and southern edges of town is a thick vernal wood. Finally, to the east is the rolling plain where Powell Air Force base lies.

Potter's Lake is an odd little town and all the locals know it. They do not understand it in an intellectual or cognitive sense, however. If people thought about it and said, "You know, this place is odd and wrong," they would probably leave...but they stay. People in Potter's Lake know that their town is different; they just do not think of it as a nexus for the bizarre and supernatural. Many of the town's idiosyncrasies are justified away as small town charm.

Any sane person, including the player characters, would look at this place and instinctively know that something is wrong. However, there is an unexplainable appeal to Potter's Lake, almost an unearthly pull that draws people to it. Perhaps it's the quaintness or the sheer absurdity of everything. Perhaps it is something more.

## HISTORY

According to the tale retold at each Fourth of July Festival, a group of patriotic citizens led by Calvin Tryst went down to the governor's house on July 4<sup>th</sup>, 1876 and forced him, at gunpoint, to institute the town's charter on a national holiday despite federal agencies having the day off. Valuing his life, the governor agreed. Afterwards, all six men were arrested and hung in a public execution. The founding stood, however. The state recognized the charter date, and the town honored Calvin Tryst and company as heroes.

Jacob Potter, a fur trader, discovered the lake about fifty years earlier. Town records indicate this occurred in

1825, but there are conflicting accounts of the event and heated debates surrounding the authority of the official date. Suffice to say, Potter's Lake was formally discovered sometime between 1823 and 1827.

Records are accurate about the introduction of religion. In 1827, the Catholic Church and its missionaries arrived to convert the savages and to help civilize the West. Within three years, despite the lack of civilization to support it, the missionaries founded St. Anselm College and broke ground for the first building. They completed what is now the Main Hall in 1831. Many speculate that this institution of higher learning encouraged the settling of the area.

At first, the town was nothing more than a collection of traders and trappers, but it eventually attracted settlers. The town served as a kind of trading post in a bad part of the country but by the turn of the century, with the advent of industrial technology, it became something different. Robert Southey first opened his paper mill in 1902. It rapidly became the major employer, turning the town into quite the exporter of paper goods.

Powell Air Force Base opened in 1951 during the Korean War and has remained open despite budget cutbacks. The base is not one of the Air Force's premier training facilities, but it manages to continue operating even with repeated rumors of base closings.

## PLACES OF INTEREST

In Potter's Lake, nearly every place has a tale to tell. Some are horrific; others are merely bizarre. While many of the places in Potter's Lake have nothing odd about them, the number that do is sizeable. The following entries are among the town's more colorful locations.

### DEKE'S BAR AND GRILL

Located on Mill Road, Deke's is one of the more popular places in town. Here, all different kinds of people mingle freely. Deke's is situated right between Southey's Paper Mill and St. Anselm College so it receives a high volume of traffic from both locations. Also, it is a favorite watering hole of the Powell AFB personnel. Surprisingly, there are few incidents.

Deke's has a reputation for serving the best food in town and draws folks looking to eat out. Its menu is typical roadhouse fare, but the food served is a cut above what one might expect in similar places. Deke's also hosts live entertainment, making it one of the hottest nightspots in town. Every night there is a band, an open mike, dancing, or some other social event that draws in college students from St. Anselm. People, particularly young people, come to Deke's to socialize.

Many of the town's influential citizens and community

### THE MEMORIAL

At Deke's Bar and Grill, the hall leading to back to the payphone and restrooms features a framed selection of photos (some old, some new), portraits, and snapshots of children and adults. There are often flowers found there, small collections of brightly colored daisies, carnations, and small chrysanthemums in vases on a shelf below. The patrons call it the Memorial. It started back in 1955 when the owner, Deke Richardson, lost his sixteen-year-old son. The boy was swimming with some younger children when he went under. Although the others tried to save him, it was no use. The boy drowned and his father was grief-stricken. Since then, Deke has kept a photo of every man, woman, or child who lost their lives in the lake so that they would never be forgotten.

leaders go to Deke's to broker shady deals over a pitcher of beer and a plate of wings. Those who make policy in Potter's Lake often do so at Deke's. It is considered neutral ground in the arena of small town politics and thus is the place where folks make and break political alliances, plan strategies, and hatch schemes. Even if it seems questionable or even reprehensible, it is still perfectly legal (most of the time).

Deke's Bar and Grill is the ultimate hub of social activity in Potter's Lake. It is a place where everyone goes and anything can happen.

### KAUFMAN'S

Kaufman's is the primary grocery store for most of Potter's Lake. It is the only one located in town, due in part to the strange misfortunes that have afflicted it over the years. In 1972, within two weeks of opening for the first time, the store burned to the ground under mysterious circumstances. Investigators believed it might have been arson, but eventually it went down in the files as "cause unknown." Kaufman's was rebuilt shortly thereafter and remained open for a year before the only tornado to touch down in Potter's Lake in the 20<sup>th</sup> century razed the building to the foundation.

After that, the fate of Kaufman's was in the air for two years. The regional chain was unwilling to put any more money into the location, and it would have vanished from Potter's Lake altogether were it not for the efforts of local entrepreneurs. They raised the money for the new building and purchased the franchise from the chain, setting the business up as a privately owned establishment.

Kaufman's has operated around the clock ever since with

a reputation for the best prices in town. Still, odd events have plagued it since it was rebuilt, and local superstition has it that the establishment is cursed and perhaps even haunted. The two initial disasters form the foundation for this legend, but a variety of strange occurrences at the store sustain the superstition.

People often joke that the graveyard shift at Kaufman's is meant literally. A cashier might see a customer walk in and vanish somewhere among the aisles. The solitary security camera might record a quick flash of a person's face or a blur of motion past the field of vision. Sometimes milk or other perishables spoil weeks ahead of the expiration date. These stories and others fuel the local rumor mill and actually add to the store's appeal. Some people shop at Kaufman's not for their fantastic prices, but in the hope of seeing a ghost or witnessing some other inexplicable event for themselves. These people usually leave Kaufman's disappointed.

The Health Department has inspected Kaufman's on numerous occasions, and it always passes with flying colors.

### ST. ANSELM

St. Anselm College was built in 1831 after Catholic missionaries journeyed into the American wilderness to civilize the west. Upon arriving in what would later be eastern Kansas in 1827, they met Jacob Potter and decided to stay. A mission was quickly built then replaced with a college. Over time, St. Anselm grew into a respected institute of higher learning and helped spur the growth of Potter's Lake.

Situated directly opposite the lake, St. Anselm is equally as important as Southey's Paper Mill as a town fixture and landmark. Despite local resentment towards the rich college students who come here for the four-year party, St. Anselm is crucial to the town's economy.

St. Anselm brings people into the region. Potter's Lake has little to offer the outside world besides its paper products. The college, however, lures people in from across North America. Each year, there are new students in town with the arrival of the latest freshman class.

The students spend a great deal of money on entertainment and alcohol. While the college has an excellent reputation as a fine academic school with a strong religious background and fundamentals, it is in fact a wholly secular party school. The student body is composed largely of wealthy teenagers who chose St. Anselm because of its reputation as a good school where they can spend four years in a drunken stupor. They major in business or some other innocuous degree that places few demands on their intellectual development and that will supposedly grant them an immediate career upon graduation. The average student does not work very hard. Most of them

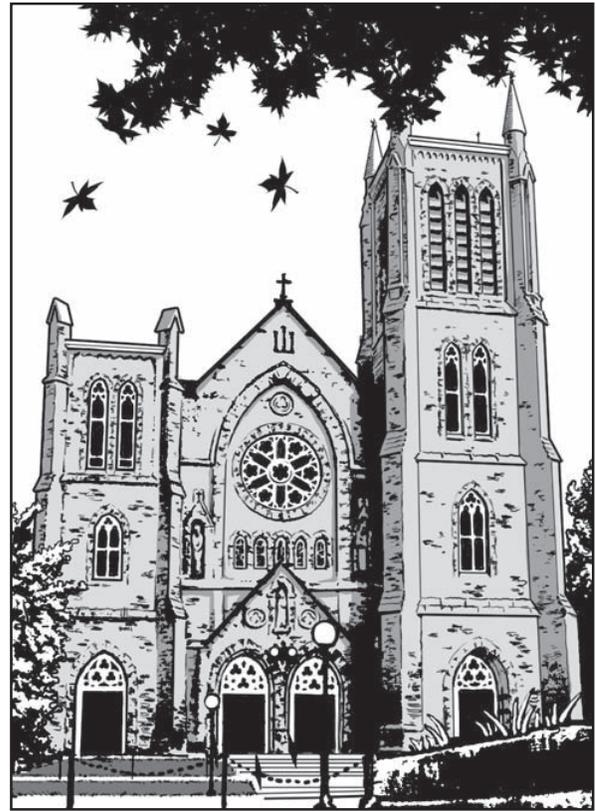
slide by with a grade-inflated B average before returning home to work for the parents who paid for their expensive tuition in the first place. All of this is unfortunate because St. Anselm does have a fine academic reputation with a competent and talented faculty that has academic pursuits firmly in mind. Most of the professors bemoan the state of the modern student who has little interest in the knowledge that the faculty has accumulated and tried to pass along.

Of particular excellence is, as one can imagine, the Religious Studies Department. There are some fine minds here interested in the pursuit of truth and the dogma of the Catholic Church. Most of these men and women are excellent teachers and truly concerned about the spiritual wellbeing of both the students and the people of Potter's Lake.

The bottom line is that one can get a fine education from St. Anselm through effort and simple application. The sad fact is that most students do not.

Like many college towns, the students have little respect for the locals or the community itself. They come to Potter's Lake for college but do not necessarily want to live here, especially since it's a somewhat disturbing slice of rural America. Likewise, the populace has little regard for the students who are rowdy, young, disrespectful, and a pain in the ass by local standards.

St. Anselm College, like Kaufman's Grocery, is no stranger to the supernatural.



## THE MAIN HALL

The Main Hall, the first building built on the campus, is known for odd occurrences. At least two windows in the front hall are continually found open regardless of the time of year. This has happened for more than fifty years, dating back to the then-dean's daughter, who was only five. In 1970, in an attempt to quell growing stories of ghostly activity, the president of the college had all the windows nailed shut. Two weeks later, all twelve windows in the Main Hall were found open with the nails lying on the floor. Since then, two windows are left open an inch or two year round to appease the spirit.

From time to time, in the late hours of the night, students claim to hear the giggling of a small girl echoing throughout the Main Hall. Many believe the ghost of that 5 yr old girl still walks the Main Hall, gleefully playing harmless pranks on the unwary.

## THE BASILICA

The basilica at St. Anselm is the archetypal Catholic church. The altar is made of chiseled marble and the tabernacle glistens with a sheen of gold. Finely polished wooden pews form neat little rows, and the Stations of the Cross are

displayed across the church walls. Stained glass windows line the top half of three walls, allowing beams of colored light to illuminate the upper level balcony. Aesthetically, the St. Anselm Basilica is breathtaking.

The rectory is attached to the backside of the church. It is here that strange things happen. The contents of cabinets switch themselves when no one is looking. Light bulbs repeatedly burn out prematurely, sometimes in mere hours. Minor accidents occur with frightening regularity. Though none of this is overtly supernatural, it's odd and recurrent enough to foster rumors and speculation.

## THE THICKET

The campus, situated on the shores of the lake, is full of restful walks and scenic vistas. Throughout the fall, winter, and spring the lanes are crowded with students and faculty as well as the occasional citizen of Potter's Lake out for a stroll. There is one area, however, that everyone avoids. It is known as the Thicket.

The Thicket began as a manicured retreat where students could study outdoors in serenity. Added to the college during the building boom of the 1910's, it is an alcove made of tall trellised rose bushes, not a stone's throw from the lake's edge. Tall trees surround it, and in the center is a shaded



set of benches around a small stone fountain, with a statue of a graceful girl in draping robes. Such secluded spots are found on campuses across the nation, but the fountain is what makes the Thicket unique.

In November 1941, Potter's Lake made headlines throughout the Catholic world when the statue manifested the wounds of Christ, or stigmata. A young couple discovered the statue and immediately told a priest who had the statue cordoned off and kept under surveillance. The bleeding lasted for two weeks then stopped, two days before Pearl Harbor. Within a month, the bleeding began again and continued intermittently through the end on World War II. The Catholic Church was suspicious of stigmata appearing on a secular piece of art but upon further investigation could find no trace of trickery. The statue was deemed a miracle but in a surprising turn of events, the file was sealed and the stigmata accounts hushed. Some believe this was because the statue had no religious basis and thus could not be accounted as a miracle per se.

In the years that followed, the statue reputedly bled on numerous occasions. It has always been a portent of doom, bleeding prior to national military movements or local tragedies. The statue has been accurate so often that campus security becomes anxious whenever someone reports blood on the statue. As often as not, it precedes a violent crime on campus such as rape or murder. The last known account of stigmata directly preceded the brutal murder of a campus co-ed at the hands of a serial killer who has since been caught by the FBI.

The Catholic Church has no comment about the statue at this time.

## ROOM 616

The faculty at St. Anselm does not like to talk about Room

616. It was the winter of 1969 when this dormitory in St. John's Hall was permanently sealed. It has remained untouched ever since.

According to spurious accounts, Father Ezekiel Cage performed an exorcism in this room. The subject was said to be a male freshman possessed by demonic forces. No official records support these claims, but the constant retelling of the story every year has lent an artificial veracity to the tale. Although no one has been known to enter the locked room for decades, rumors continue to swirl regarding the secrets contained within. Some say there are obscenities scrawled on the walls in black crayon or even human blood. Others speak of strange burn marks on the walls and furniture. Still others claim that although Father Cage cast the Devil from the student, he did not send it back to Hell; that the Devil still sleeps in Room 616, awaiting a new victim to walk through the door.

## SOUTHEY'S PAPER MILL

Southey's Paper Mill is another fixture crucial to the town's economy. The mill is the largest employer in the area and manufactures paper products for hygienic consumption (such as toilet paper, paper towels, and napkins). The mill borders the lake, directly across from St. Anselm College. Mill Road runs east to west, from the lake to the highway, and separates the two institutions.

The mill opened in 1902 under the helm of Robert Southey. Since then, it has been passed down through the generations. Robert Jr. took it from his father, Robert III from him, and the current proprietor is Robert IV.

Robert III turned it into a hugely successful operation in the 60's by concentrating solely on disposable paper products at a time when such things were coming into vogue. Robert IV, "Bob" to most people, was wise enough

## THE SOUTHEY FAMILY CURSE

Robert Morris Southey I, undeterred by naysayers who felt that small western towns weren't ready to support industry, built and ran a paper mill, the first of its kind, in the Potter's Lake area. In only a few years, the mill made Southey a wealthy man. When asked about his success, he claimed he simply listened to the will of God, a claim that added to his popularity in the small and deeply Christian community. Legends claim, however, that Southey was laid under a curse despite his God-fearing nature.

Southey was building his mansion, stories say, when one of the contractors was injured and comatose after completing most of the ornate woodcarving that decorates the interior. Southey waited a week for the man to recover then hired someone else to finish the work. When the contractor awoke and regained his health, he returned and requested payment. Southey refused. The man was furious upon hearing this and cursed the house and the work he'd done. He swore that Southey and anyone living under that roof would never know peace. Unfortunately, he was still severely injured and the confrontation caused him to have a stroke. He died there on the spot.

Southey was an intelligent, insightful man who didn't believe in superstition, but all that knowledge couldn't save his first wife, Elizabeth, and his son, Jacob, when the house caught fire in 1909. The house was saved, but his wife and son were both asleep at the time and perished. His second wife, Mary, was with him for six years before she finally bore him a daughter, whom they named Caroline. Mary died of influenza a year later. Southey remained a widower for five years, raising his daughter alone. Finally, at the age of sixty, he married again and produced a son, Robert Southey II.

Robert Southey the Second (or Robby, as he was called) came into his inheritance at twenty-two. At the age of thirty, Robby married Alice Peterson, the daughter of his chief foreman. They had three children over the next six years: Robert Southey III, Helen, and Luke. It was 1943 that Robby decided to answer his nation's call to arms and enlisted. He died in France, in the fall of 1944. Alice, his widow, never remarried. Alice died in 1964 after a five-year battle with cancer. Helen died of congenital heart defect at age thirty-six, leaving two children. Luke lost his legs in the Korean War and never married.

Robert Southey III also suffered from heart disease, an inherited malady from his mother's side. He married Alicia McCarthy, the daughter of a wealthy Texas oil magnate, in 1972. She bore him five children, the eldest of whom was Robert Southey IV. Alicia died in 1991, years of secret alcoholism taking its toll.

Robert Southey IV, known locally as Bob, lives with his extended family at the Southey mansion, the house his great-grandfather built a century ago. Locals claim those family members who died now haunt the house, and it is said Southey the First appears just prior to a tragedy. While nothing has happened yet, there are many who believe the Southey Curse is simply biding its time.

The mill has known its share of ill fortune too, from mysterious injuries to missing workers, to saws and presses that malfunction without warning. To the credit of Bob Southey IV, the safety record at the mill has improved greatly. Still, accidents of one variety or the other happen with chilling regularity. Some believe this is the Southey Curse at work.

to see the coming ecological backlash of the 90's and took steps to make Southey's an environmentally friendly mill by 1989. He also recycled paper long before many of his competitors. In short, both he and his father are shrewd businessmen who have kept the mill open through ingenuity and anticipation of a changing market. Both men are revered as local heroes.

## MEMORIAL HOSPITAL

The Potter's Lake Memorial Hospital, southeast of Main Street, is a curious amalgam of the old and the new. The original building was constructed in 1930 with additional

wings added throughout the years. The hospital has a sterling reputation, competent staff, and the most modern medical equipment available. All in all, it's a fine institute, but like most buildings in Potter's Lake, it has its stories.

## THE MORGUE

On their own, morgues are creepy enough. They are halfway houses for the dead and grim reminders of human mortality. The morgue in the basement of the Potter's Lake Memorial Hospital is all that and more.

Modern folklore speaks of hospital employees who have ventured to the morgue after hearing the metallic ringing



of an old-fashioned bicycle horn. What they saw could be considered comical if it wasn't so terrifying: a clown, done up in white face paint and a conical hat, peddling about the morgue on a unicycle. The bodies of the dead are sitting up on their cold steel slabs, enraptured by the movement of the clown. Seconds after the employee's intrusion, the show stops and all heads slowly turn toward the unwanted visitor who quickly flees the scene. This horrific sideshow exists as a friend-of-a-friend urban myth with no one actually seeing the ghastly event for him or herself. Some of the hospital staff jokingly refer to the clown as "Mourgie" and laugh off this bizarre, unexplained modern-day ghost story.

## THE SOUTHEY WING

Robert Southey III donated the Southey Wing in the 1950s after a polio epidemic struck the town. Over thirty severe cases of polio spread among the children of Potter's Lake, beginning with the sons and daughters of many mill workers. Most of the children endured some form of paralysis, many severe. The hospital had to purchase extra respirators, or iron lungs, to keep their young patients breathing, but it had no place to put them. The city donated a portion of the school gymnasium for the care of the children until other quarters were erected, and the Southey family oversaw the construction of a new wing specifically for that purpose. Once the wing was built, the hospital

moved the children into the new state-of-the-art building which it then used exclusively for the care of polio inflicted patients until the early 1970s. After that point, the wing offered other pediatric services, and the antiquated iron lungs were eventually replaced with new portable models.

The last iron lung patient left the Southey Wing on 1980. All the old iron lungs had been sold by this point, replaced with the modern equipment.

Since then, when the wing is quiet, one can hear the deep resonating sound of an iron lung, the mechanical rush of air moving in and out of its bellows. Between the pulses of the machine, the faint crying of a child can be heard. The sounds emanate from an empty storage room that had once been a large open hall prior to remodeling, filled with children lying in huge tank-like respirators. These noises always stop when someone approaches the storage room. Some people believe that the souls of the children who died from the polio epidemic haunt the Southey Wing, unable to move on to whatever reward awaits them.

On numerous occasions, the Potter's Lake Ghost Hunters Society has asked permission to investigate the Southey Wing. To date, every request has been denied.

## THE BRANDEIS THEATRE

Stephen Harker, an original resident of Potter's Lake, began construction of the Brandeis Theatre in the spring

of 1884. The architecture firm of Smith & Stutter, out of Kansas City, designed the structure as a “testament to the glories of the modern age.” The Harker family spared no expense and imported sculptors, stonemasons, and artists from Chicago to work on it.

The Brandeis Theatre was the pride of Potter's Lake for many years, until motion pictures stole away its audience. Use of the theatre stopped in the late 1970's. It still hosted a show or two, but it never made any money at that point, and age was taking its toll on the Brandeis. In the 1980's, a new theatre opened in Potter's Lake, and the Brandeis closed its doors, seemingly for good. The owner was going to tear the place down when the Potter's Lake Historical Society stepped in. They raised money to buy the Brandeis and have it refurbished to serve as a community fine art center.

During the remodeling, workers had to tear down the back wall of the building and put it back up. At the time, it was decided that one of the back exits should be moved to allow for better positioning with some of the modern stage equipment recently installed. Where the old door once stood there is now only solid wall...most of the time. Every now and then, someone reports finding the old door where it used to be. In some of these reports it opens to a brick wall; in others, it leads to the alleyway behind the Brandeis. A few of the more fanciful tales claim that the doorway is actually a portal into the past, and by walking through it, a person can step into the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Most people doubt the existence of the disappearing door, and only the most gullible believe it's a gateway to another time.

The theatre itself, at the corner of Main and Maple, can hold 500 individuals with a moveable stage, an orchestra pit, and a balcony. The Brandeis Theatre hosts no fewer than four plays per year. It also shows vintage films, both speaking and silent, the latter with the Potter's Lake Chamber Orchestra in the pit for accompaniment. In addition, the front second story of the building has been converted from offices to classrooms that hold workshops on everything from acting to woodcarving.

Recently, the Potter's Lake Historical Society successfully lobbied to have the theatre declared a historical landmark.

## TRYST MANOR

Tryst Manor is another historical landmark. Now maintained by the Potter's Lake Historical Society, the estate was originally owned by local legend Calvin Tryst. Tryst built his house by hand and finished it just months prior to his death in 1876. It remained empty and unused for nearly twenty-five years.

In 1900, Tryst Manor was declared a historical landmark. One year later, the building was opened to the public for tours and select civil functions. For the last few years, the Potter's Lake Historical Society has maintained the estate.

Civic functions and celebrations are no longer held at the manor, but tours of the building still continue. The ground floor of Tryst Manor now serves as town museum, replete with gift shop and snack bar. Tours run six days a week and admission is free.

## THE CAIN HOUSE

Annabella Visconti is the current owner of the notorious property known as the Cain House. The building is a turn-of-the-century, three-story, brick-and-timber home. It is in excellent shape, having been well cared for over the years. Annabella purchased the old house on the outskirts of town for a song; its infamy as a crime scene site all but guaranteed it.

The house's previous owner, Luther Cain, was a serial killer who plagued Potter's Lake and the surrounding area for years before his capture in the winter of 2000. Seven bodies were discovered in the basement of the Cain House, buried in pits of lime beneath its dirt floor. Luther Cain, only 33 years of age, died of heart failure while in police custody, never reaching trial for his hideous crimes. Oddly enough, the autopsy revealed no medical condition that could sufficiently account for his death, and family medical records indicated no inherited disposition to heart disease. Although baffled, no one really cared. Everyone simply wanted to lay to rest the demon of Luther Cain.

Luther's only living relative was an older brother named Bartholomew, a mentally retarded ward of the state. Because of Bartholomew's situation, the Cain House went up for public auction but had few interested buyers. The stigma of the recent murders was simply too much for most to handle. It took a few months, but the Cain House was finally sold to Annabella Visconti, a recent transplant to Potter's Lake.

Since the seven-bedroom home was more space than Annabella could ever need (she has no husband or children), the place was turned into a boarding house. Many boarders have come and gone over the last year, with no one staying longer than three months. More than one tenant has departed prematurely upon hearing the background of the Cain House. Still, the six guest bedrooms are more often occupied than not.

## SUICIDE SPOT

The old Potter's Lake High School was used until 1960, when the population boom forced the creation of the current high school. The building itself is still attractive though the windows are boarded up to keep what little remains of their glass from falling out. The school is abandoned, fenced off to keep children and vagrants away. There is talk periodically of either condemning or restoring the school

for civic use, but neither is likely to happen anytime soon. The memories of the Suicide Spot are still too strong.

It was 1955 and Elizabeth Barnett was just 17 years old. She and Andy O'Connell had been going steady for a year. Most people thought they would marry. In fact, Andy promised Elizabeth that they would marry someday after high school. Elizabeth believed him. But before the end of their senior year, everything changed. Elizabeth became pregnant.

Elizabeth's strong Catholic upbringing made her feel guilty and fearful of revealing her condition to anyone, including Andy. Eventually though, Elizabeth worked up the courage to tell Andy, expecting that they would quickly marry, and no one would be the wiser when the baby was born. After all, the two were in love. Elizabeth shared the news with Andy on Prom Night, whispering into his ear during the last dance. The effect was immediate. Andy stopped dancing and just stared at her. He grasped her hand, pulled his ring off her finger, and walked away.

Elizabeth was shattered. She called out his name and tried to follow, but he grabbed her by the shoulders and pushed her away. Andy had his heart set on going to college back East and couldn't handle getting married and becoming a father. He told her he wanted nothing to do with her or the baby, and that it was her problem, not his. Elizabeth turned white as a sheet and ran out the door crying.

Elizabeth returned to the gymnasium at about 1:00 a.m. She found one of the doors unlocked and went in. Elizabeth had her father's .45 caliber pistol in one hand and a letter in the other. After placing the letter on the edge of the stage, she shot herself in the head. She died instantly. Elizabeth was six weeks pregnant at the time.

Andy O'Connell was found the next day in Kansas City where he had gotten drunk and thrown in jail until he sobered up. Upon hearing the news of Elizabeth's death, he suffered a nervous breakdown. He was placed in the Peaceful Valley Sanitarium for a year before being released. He never fully recovered from the event. He died one year later, committing suicide in the old gym.

The administration hoped that over time people would forget about the suicides. They were wrong. Unhappy students seemed attracted to the place, and more than one committed suicide in the gym, earning the place its notorious nickname. The Suicide Spot name stuck regardless of the efforts by school and church officials to put an end to it.

When the new high school was completed, the old one was shut down. No attempt was made to reopen it or use it for any civic or extracurricular activities. One year before the old school was closed for good, the gym was closed altogether with the entrances sealed and the windows boarded. For a few years, kids would break into the building, but in time it was forgotten. The suicide attempts stopped and life went back to normal.

No one wants the old building reopened, afraid of what might happen to the town's children. The memories and

fear of the Suicide Spot remain.

## HOLLYVALE CEMETERY

Hollyvale is the old secular cemetery for Potter's Lake that was used for non-Catholic burials until 1915. All of the plots in the cemetery were nearly filled when it was decided to build the new Potter's Lake Cemetery east of town. The planners never accounted for sudden population growth in the original planning, and it was necessary to add a second resting place for the deceased.

The old cemetery remained open until 1920 but closed due to the deaths of both the caretaker and the cemetery chaplain from diphtheria. Fear of the deadly infectious disease stopped anyone from entering the cemetery for years, and in time it was forgotten.

The chapel at Hollyvale Cemetery is not much to speak of: only one room with the altar at one end and a place for the casket in front of it. Shards of jagged stained glass jut out of the window frames, the aftermath of vandalism and the weather.

In 1956, lightning struck the old chapel in Hollyvale Cemetery. Being not much more than rotten wood and stone, it caught fire immediately. The fire department was hard pressed to do anything about the fire because the woods had grown up around and through the grounds from lack of use. The gates were rusted shut, and they had to cut the chain to get in because no one had a key to the lock anymore. The firemen did their best to keep the fire from spreading and managed to keep it out of the woods proper. What was left was a smoking ruin that ought to have been torn down but somehow never was.

Over the ensuing years, Hollyvale became a hangout for young adults who would gather to drink, smoke cigarettes, swap ghost stories, and sometimes perform séances to entertain themselves. In the early 90s, a group of St. Anselm students anonymously circulated flyers and

### THE GHOST HUNTERS SOCIETY

The Potter's Lake Ghost Hunters Society is a group of individuals devoted to the study of paranormal phenomenon, specifically ghosts. The society formed in 1984 and has been investigating hauntings ever since. They have investigated many of the town's more famous haunts, including Kaufman's, Hugent Farm, and Lover's Lane. Although the society claims to have proof of spectral activity via gauss meters, photographs, and anomalous temperature readings, many people in Potter's Lake remain skeptical of their findings.

pamphlets that claimed Hollyvale Cemetery was not only a place of debauchery, but also one of seven portals to Hell. This was followed by the abduction of a 4-year-old girl from her front yard. She was found two days later, unconscious and unharmed, within the ruins of Hollyvale Chapel. Because of such incidents, the police started keeping Hollyvale under much closer surveillance, and reports of vandalism and trespassing dropped significantly. Still, deputies have spotted unexplained lights around the chapel at odd hours of the night, and some have reported hearing wailing coming from that location. To date, all investigations into these phenomena have yielded no explanations.

## HUGENT FARM

The old Hugent Farm is all but deserted these days. Although it is still occupied by Daniel Hugent, age 88, he has allowed the property to fall into disrepair.

Daniel doesn't leave the main farmhouse much these days for fear of his life. According to him, the ghosts of Indians slain by his ancestors haunt the property, seeking Daniel's life in retribution for their own deaths. On multiple occasions, friends and family have tried to move Daniel or get him to sell the property, but to no avail. Although terrified, Daniel refuses to sell and "cater to them damn redskins," as he so eloquently puts it. His family, none of which are residents of Potter's Lake, considered having him committed but ultimately didn't have the heart to do it. Daniel Hugent, though eccentric, poses no threat to anyone, even himself.

The Potter's Lake Ghost Hunters Society has investigated the Hugent Farm on several occasions and concluded that there are indeed spectral forces at work. However, they believe the ghosts to be those of slaves murdered years ago, not Native Americans. While Daniel Hugent respects the

## THE GHOST LINE

The Underground Railroad of the Civil War used Potter's Lake as a stop, but the escaping slaves feared it almost as badly as being captured. They called it the Ghost Line, and very few who came this way were heard from again. One of the stops was the old Hugent Farm, now only a short distance from Southey's Paper Mill. The legends say that on nights when the moon is bright, you can see the shadows of the dead slaves on the ground, hanging from trees no longer standing. How they came to this fate is anyone's guess.

society's opinion, he strongly disagrees. Every few nights, he hears the dead braves chanting and yelling from the overgrown fields, demanding a payment of blood for past transgressions.

## THE AURORA

The Aurora Motel was originally built in the 50s, when the lure of the open road was at its peak. At the time, chain hotels hadn't really come into existence, and the Aurora was the modern wonder of the Potter's Lake roadway age. It hosted the visiting parents of St. Anselm students and travelers who day tripped out from Kansas City and Topeka for a little fun at the lake. Neat, clean, and affordable, it did a brisk business for decades. In the 70's, however, that all changed when the Aurora was the scene of one of the worst homicides in the history of Potter's Lake.

In 1978, Chuck Johnson (then owner of the Aurora) discovered his wife Barbara was cheating on him with



multiple men. Chuck Johnson was always a little hotheaded, but this time his rage was inhuman. Chuck knew his wife was using one of the motel rooms for her secret liaisons, but he was unsure which one. So, one by one, he kicked open the doors to rooms and shot anyone he saw inside. He got to Room 6 before he found his wife hiding with her latest lover. He shot them both before turning the shotgun on himself. A total of ten people died in the deadly rampage with three injured.

The Aurora Motel was sold three times since then, each time getting seedier and seedier. The last owners even tried to market Room 6 as the “Scene of the Aurora Massacre.” Today, the motel is clean and trim once again, thanks to its current owners. Aware of the motel’s history, they feel they can overcome the stigma surrounding the Aurora.

## POWELL AFB

The facility opened in 1951 with a great deal of controversy. Many questioned why an Air Force base was necessary near the Kansas-Missouri border and because it was built as a training facility, its presence was even more unusual. Despite this, Powell has managed to remain open ever since.

The Air Force still maintains the facility despite dwindling crops of recruits arriving here for training. With the wave of military base closings in the early 90’s, everyone figured that Powell was doomed. It continues to operate, however, even with the annual threats of its demise.

Although Powell is listed as a training facility, it functions under a surprising level of secrecy for such a run-of-the-mill task. Powell only has a small area of the base accessible

### MEN IN BLACK

Everyone knows the image: black suits and mirror shades, rigid posture and mechanical voices. They silence and harass those unfortunate enough to witness a UFO or other unexplained phenomenon. Some say they are agents of an alien intelligence. Others say they work for the United States government and military. Some say they are active in Potter’s Lake.

There are rumors of Men in Black showing up at people’s homes in the middle of the night and taking them away. These rumors link the Men in Black to Powell, claiming them to be agents from the base. But while this gossip continues to circulate, no proof has ever come to light. The military denies these rumors, and the Potter’s Lake Sheriff’s Department finds them laughable. Still, they persist.

### PROJECT: BLUEBOOK

There were rumors back in the seventies that Powell Air Force Base was the secret headquarters for Project: Bluebook, the government’s investigation into the UFO phenomenon. Local scuttlebutt claims the Air Force has proof of extraterrestrial life and that this proof is concealed at Powell AFB. The conspiracy theorists often cite Powell’s unusually tight security as proof positive for their wild allegations. These allegations, of course, are completely unfounded.

to the general public, requiring an official parking sticker to be allowed inside. The only two publicly accessible gates are guarded twenty-four hours a day, and armed guards man the gates of classified areas.

The number of civilians employed by the base is very small in comparison to other facilities of a similar size, keeping Powell AFB and Potter’s Lake from developing the symbiotic relationship that infuses so many “military” towns.

## LOCKHAVEN OBSERVATORY

Lockhaven Observatory, built from 1953 to 1957, lies outside of Potter’s Lake proper. Abandoned and locked shut in 1981, it has remained relatively unscathed by the years of neglect. The grounds, overgrown with vegetation, are the only indication that the building is not in use. Private institutes and organizations have offered to buy or lease the observatory (to make use of its excellent, though dated, commercial telescope) but its owner, Montgomery Lockhaven, always refuses. Montgomery, a citizen and current resident of Great Britain, is the grandson of the observatory’s original owner and financier, Archibald Lockhaven.

Archibald Lockhaven was not a native to Potter’s Lake or even America for that matter. He was a wealthy Englishman who inherited his fortune, never working a day in his life. By all accounts, he was a personable fellow whose views and opinions were insightful and highly regarded; except when it came to the little green men.

Lockhaven came to Potter’s Lake in 1953 and used his considerable wealth to construct the observatory that bears his name. Whenever someone asked why he built the observatory so far from his native land, he would respond matter-of-factly, with a straight face, “Because the little green men told me I should.”

According to Archibald, three diminutive green men from another world visited him one evening and instructed him to travel to Potter’s Lake and build an observatory.

These otherworldly beings also told Archibald that he wasn't really human, but one of them operating undercover. Apparently, Archibald believed his cover so much, he had forgotten about his true nature. Lockhaven was to use the observatory to find their native planet among the countless stars so all four of them could finally return home. For nearly five years, Archibald spent a sizable amount of his wealth constructing the observatory for this purpose. He spent the rest of his days in Potter's Lake, gazing into the nighttime sky.

Archibald Lockhaven died in 1981, at the age of 99. He never found his way home.

## THE WOODS

Thick woods surround Potter's Lake on three sides. It looks pleasant enough for afternoon picnics and recreational camping, but the locals know better than that. The woods are not safe. There are stories of disappearances and accidents, abandoned cabins that are never in the same place twice, and a graveyard predating the Civil War that is so weatherworn and overgrown by forest, that the grave markers are nameless. Parents tell their children not to play in the woods though it has become customary for teens to brave the forest for one evening. Town legends feature the woods themselves, almost as a regular character. The superstitious believe that there is something in the woods, but nobody talks about it because it's considered bad luck to do so.

Since 1947, the woods around Potter's Lake average twenty-four disappearances per year.

## MEGIDDO'S HILL

Father Aloysius Dominic, one of the original missionaries to the area, was the first to discover the Monolith, an oddly shaped stone covered with weatherworn pictographs assumed to be of Native American origin. The Monolith is a triangular slab of rock two feet thick, four feet wide, and nearly eight feet tall that juts out of the ground. The edges are jagged and the stone slab leans slightly to one side. Strange symbols are etched into both sides of the Monolith, though time has made them nearly impossible to perceive.

The Monolith rests atop a small hill nestled deep in the heart of the woods. It was Father Aloysius who named this topographical feature Megiddo's Hill, though his motivation for doing so remains a mystery. According to local legends, the Monolith and the hill it rests upon are said to be many things; an Indian burial ground, an alien artifact, and an altar to the Devil are the most popular. To date, no one has been able to explain the purpose of the Monolith or decipher its cryptic markings. The brave



few who venture to Megiddo's Hill speak of a palpable uneasiness to the place.

There are some who say that the Monolith is what really brought the missionaries to Potter's Lake those many years ago and that the Vatican still has an interest in it to this day.

## THE DEVIL'S CLAW

The Devil's claw is the name given to the odd, old tree, split by lightning, about two miles into the woods. It is a

### THE SAND DUNE

Among the stranger legends of Potter's Woods is that of the mysterious sand dune that is supposedly somewhere among the shifting trees. The legend dates back to the Dustbowl era when the worst dust storm ever blew through Potter's Lake destroying property and taking lives. The "Black Blizzard" lasted for hours, coating the town and woods in inches of dirt. While other dust storms left Potter's lake mostly untouched due to the surrounding woods, this one blew the roofs off houses, suffocating animals and people alike. From that day to present, children have come back from playing in the woods with sand in their clothes and shoes, not knowing how it got there. Though many have tried to find it, no one has ever located the mysterious sand dune. Most of the parents dismiss the legend out of hand, disregarding the evidence to the contrary.

### THE CABIN AND THE WILD MAN

Nestled deep in Potter's Woods, tucked away beneath a canopy of trees, is "The Cabin." Plenty of reputable folk have come across it while in the woods, so everyone assumes it really exists. The problem is, it has the unsettling habit of not staying in one place for too long.

The Potter's Lake Historical Society and the Sheriff's Department have made a number of attempts to locate the cabin over the years. Two such attempts, in 1988 and 1999 respectively, made use of helicopters and planes for aerial reconnaissance. Still, the cabin remained as elusive as ever, continuing to be invisible to investigating eyes.

Eyewitnesses describe the cabin as small and rundown. The windows are boarded shut, and rot has overtaken much of the structure. Dozens of animal bones litter the cabin's porch, and animal entrails hang from rusted hooks on the porch's ceiling. A pack of wild dogs, numbering from three to seven according to different accounts, stalks the area around the cabin. Their snarling muzzles and glaring eyes are enough to drive off most people, but when they fail, there is always the "Wild Man".

A few, though not many, of the accounts include the appearance of the so-called "Wild Man of the Woods." He is said to emerge from the cabin when the dogs are not enough to frighten off the unwanted. They say his eyes burn like fire and his voice unsettles the soul. His old, ripped clothing is unidentifiable, and his long, grey mane is a tattered and matted mess. He waves his arms about frantically when he speaks while clutching a gnarled tree limb. Affixed to his homemade staff is a silver crucifix, bound in place with twine. His ranting is laced with caustic warnings and biblical imagery, but it's the tone of these sermons, not the words themselves, that have such an unnerving effect on the listener. The eyewitnesses say that as his preaching reaches a fever pitch, the dogs begin baying along in a twisted cacophony. Upon hearing this din, every eyewitness has fled the scene. Most never desire to return to this place, but those few who do are never able to find the cabin again, no matter how long or hard they search.

The identity of the wild man of the woods and the secret of the moving cabin remain two of the more intriguing mysteries of Potter's Lake. Neither is likely to be solved anytime soon.

favorite spot of college students who like to camp there for an evening and tell ghost stories, usually as part of some initiation rite for one of the fraternities. Countless stories exist about the old tree, most of which are fabrications by imaginative students. Popular tradition holds that each initiate must tell a homemade ghost story and incorporate the Devil's Claw into the tale. Over the years, a massive body of lore has become affixed to the gnarled tree as old and new stories build upon one another. Although the authorities always worry about something happening to the pledges who spend the night at the Devil's Claw, there have been no incidents to date. Oddly enough, this makes the old tree the safest place in all of Potter's Woods, despite tales to the contrary.

### GAS & GOSPEL

Today, there is only one road that actually runs through the woods, and it is little used at best. It's State Highway 128, a short stretch of road linking Potter's Lake to Highway 56. Travelers routinely report odd occurrences along this route such as cars mysteriously stalling, hitchhikers who fade from view as you pass them, and even running over phantom animals or people that jump in front of the car

and vanish afterward. Even worse, people who get out of their cars to check for damage or victims sometimes disappear themselves.

The only business on this highway is Reverend Geebee's Gas & Gospel. Old man Geebee is a fixture in Potter's Lake and the surrounding area, not only for his reputed ability to accurately diagnose and fix automotive ailments, but also for his art. A modern folk art sculptor, Rev. GeeBee's marionettes are a prized commodity among area collectors, along with the small, carved "protector" figures he gives away. The scope of his work, however, can only be realized by going inside the concrete and bottle glass walls surrounding his property and into his sculpture yard. There, "Papa" as Rev. GeeBee calls himself, has filled the area with larger than life-size sculptures in metal, wood, and plastic. Most have a religious theme, though many also explore his African-American heritage. To Rev. GeeBee though, they serve a different purpose. He believes they are little saints, antennas for the holy power of God, keeping everything safe within the walls of his property.

The Reverend considers himself a guide to Heaven. According to Papa, the Lord visited him and told him to, "Help the people going into the wilderness and spread the word of God's strength and loving kindness to everyone who passes this way."



As Rev. GeeBee sees it, “I don’t just sell gas and fix cars; I give directions through the dark ways that men and women walk.”

His “protectors”, little handcrafted figurines, are always freely given (never sold) to those Papa deems needy. Rev. GeeBee claims his “protectors” keep people safe from the temptations of the Devil, particularly those people who must venture into Potter’s Woods. Considering the myths and stories regarding the woods, many are inclined to agree with him.

## THE LAKE

The woods are not the only mysterious natural feature of the landscape. The other is the lake for which the town is named. It’s a peaceful stretch of water with a strange history of unpredictable incidents. The summertime sunsets reflecting off its surface are spectacular, but the locals do not swim or boat there very much these days. The high number of drowning deaths and the unusual occurrences surrounding them has scared most folk off. In a couple of

incidents, adults have drowned in shallow water. In others, several people simply dove into the deep water and never returned to the surface. Even with the massive reduction in recreational traffic, there is still at least one drowning death per year.

During the early part of the 1900’s, the lake was the center of the town’s community calendar. Ice cream socials, fireworks, and boating were regular events throughout the year. The placement of Tryst Park reflects this, continuing the strip of manicured green lawns from the grounds of St. Anselm, down past the Town Square and City Hall, and along the lakeshore. Somehow all this changed.

By 1970, fatalities from boating accidents were up to four a year. In 1984, the city council put an end to organized recreational boating on the lake, and the boathouse was closed. In 1992, swimming was restricted to the park area, and City Hall hired lifeguards to supervise swimmers. These actions did decrease the number of deaths and close calls, allowing earlier boating and swimming restrictions to be lessened somewhat. Still, the lake claims at least one victim per year.

In the local mythology, the lake is considered to be

### ST. ANSELM AND THE WOODS

There are accusations from St. Anselm's detractors that the missionaries founded the college for more than academic enlightenment. As the story goes, the Vatican sent missionaries to introduce Christ to the savages and to help bring God to a border town in the lawless west. What they found was something unexpected. The stories do not say what the missionaries discovered, but it did alarm them. Some say that the college was a cover for the local priests so they could closely study whatever it was they uncovered in the wilderness.

St. Anselm College is also home to one of the Catholic Church's famous exorcists, a priest trained specifically to deal with spiritual or demonic possession. For those who believe that there is more to the founding of St. Anselm College than meets the eye, this is further proof that something strange is going on in the woods, something insidious and evil, and that the Vatican is aware of it.

In 1831, when St. Anselm was founded, there were barely any settlers to speak of and certainly none to educate. Records show that the original graduating class of St. Anselm numbered only five. Why then did the Catholic Church give its permission for the school's founding where there were no students, only expense and danger? Could it be because a university gave the Vatican a reason to send some of its most skilled spiritual researchers to the American wilderness?

far more hospitable than the woods, though no more trustworthy. People maintain a sense of trepidation regarding the lake though not the type of irrational fear that is often engendered by the woods. Although cautious, the townsfolk do not shy away from the lake.

## SOCIAL EVENTS

Potter's Lake celebrates all the major holidays in much the same way as most towns across America. However, Independence Day and Halloween are celebrated with a little more zeal than one is likely to find elsewhere. The town also has a few social events, which are entirely unique to Potter's Lake. These celebrations say a lot about the personality of Potter's Lake and the people who call it home.

### FOURTH OF JULY

Potter's Lake was officially founded on July 4<sup>th</sup>, 1876 making the Fourth of July Festival the biggest annual event of the year. Given the founders established the community on the centennial anniversary of the birth of the nation,

patriotism for both the town and the country runs deep among the native residents. It is a source of great pride that Potter's Lake is the only town in America that was officially founded on such a significant national holiday.

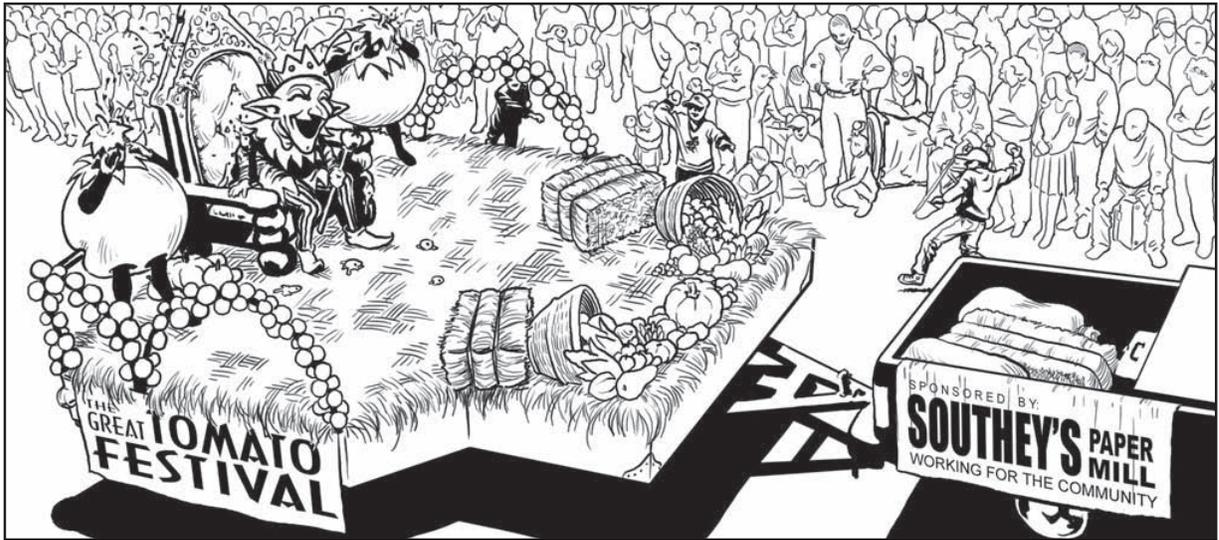
The annual Fourth of July Festival is huge. It includes a parade, a baking contest, a town picnic, and a fireworks display of epic proportion. The festivities begin with the traditional Founding Day Parade, which runs down the length of Main Street and ends at St. Anselm. The parade is followed by the carnival at Tryst Park, which features a variety of rides, games, and contests.

### THE GREAT TOMATO FESTIVAL

Each year, on the 28<sup>th</sup> of September, Potter's Lake celebrates the Great Tomato Festival. A lavish parade, rivaling the one on the Fourth of July, opens the festivities of the day. The parade is filled with floats manned by adults costumed as giant ripened tomatoes. The "Goblin King" of the festival sits upon his throne on the last float, waving to the onlookers. Armed with tomatoes, the local children pelt the Goblin King's float as it passes by. The Festival is followed by a banquet at Tryst Park. Everything served is tomato based, ranging from the mundane (tomato soup,

### LOVER'S LANE

Surrounding the lake is the local lover's lane, a scenic stretch of road with a number of secluded areas seemingly custom-made for romance. Young couples drive out together at night, drawn by the beauty, lack of public lighting, and relative privacy that the road affords. Most are wary, however, of parking on the side of the road closest to the water. Like most of Potter's Lake, Lover's Lane has no shortage of unusual occurrences. More than one couple has been carried away by the moment only to discover the lake is far closer to the car, no matter how far away they parked. The far side of Lover's Lane is reputedly haunted as well. Couples have reported a ghostly figure three times over the last decade, darting in and out of the tree line, accompanied by a quiet sobbing sound. Searches for the figure have repeatedly turned up nothing, and the origin of this ghost has never been explained.



tomato sandwiches, etc.) to the downright bizarre (such as tomato cakes and tomato pies). The Great Tomato Festival has been a Potter's Lake tradition for well over a century, and it continues to be popular among the locals.

According to local legend, a fierce goblin lived in Potter's Woods and once a year, on the 28<sup>th</sup> of September, the creature would descend on the town and vandalize with reckless abandon. Each year, the townsfolk would close their businesses, bar the doors to their homes, and cover in fear of the goblin's rampage. One year a market owner forgot to put away his tomato stand. He watched curiously as the goblin approached the stand, ate a single tomato, and hobbled back into the woods. The next year, everyone in town left a tomato on their front stoop as an offering to the goblin. The tactic worked. The attacks stopped and Potter's Lake knew peace on that September day each year.

To this day, it is still tradition for households to place tomatoes on their front porches to appease the goblin of Potter's Woods.

### LITTLE LEAGUE

Potter's Lake has little league baseball, just like every other town in America. In Potter's Lake, however, the game and the league are local obsessions. Various teams recruit little boys and girls, and all parents are passionately defensive of their child's talents and position on the starting roster. Parents even host representatives from the various teams in their homes in an unintentional parody of college recruitment. Recruiters will often go to great lengths to sign a little boy or girl, with rumors of bribes circulating frequently. Some of the children are as young as seven.

No season ends without at least one riot in the stands.

## HALLOWEEN

The town revels in this macabre holiday. The trick or treating tradition is preceded by a weeklong celebration that includes a costume contest, a pumpkin smashing competition, a dinner and dance, and a pumpkin pie bakeoff. On Halloween night, trick or treating goes on late into the evening, and there is a ghost story competition held down at the lake.

People are strongly advised not to venture into the woods on October 31<sup>st</sup>. There are stories of frequent disappearances in the woods on Halloween night. Most people follow this advice, not wanting to become another statistic.

## PUBLIC SERVICE BALLS

Every year, the Sheriff's Department and the Fire Department hold their annual balls. Unfortunately, for the last twenty years, they have been on the same night. This was originally a scheduling error, but after degenerating into a feud between the two organizations, it became a contest to see who would have a better turnout and the more elaborate ball.

The two departments get along fine until about a month before the events. Then the rivalry begins. It generally lasts until a week after the balls, and then life settles down and returns to normal.